QUEST FOR ENGENDERING ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF PEACE THROUGH MEDIA IMAGES AND CITIZEN DIPLOMACY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

India-Pakistan relations have been mired in conflict since their inception ass independent states-it remains virtually, as aptly quoted my Michael Brecher, as a constant state of an undeclared war.

Any analysis of India-Pakistan relations has to analyzed in the backdrop of the insolvability of the Kashmir issue which has clouded over other issues and aspects of the relation, due to which *stability and convergences seems to be like meager interruptions in between successive periods of instability and discord.* The Kashmir issue has been a determinant of the level of relations since the Partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and still evades an amicable solution. The congenital animosity between these two Frontline states has shaped the politico-economic dynamics of the South Asian region. As a result, the security imperative has been a predominant aspect in Indo-Pakistani ties and especially in the context of the threat of global terrorism in the post-9/11 world. The aspect of terrorism as a factor of security has been an important dimension in India-Pakistan relations, especially since the 1990s. Other outstanding issues have been virtually relegated to the background in the face of Pakistan's unrelentingly hardline stance on the Kashmir issue. Bilateral relations have been strained and held hostage to the Kashmir issue.

KEYWORDS: *Independent States, Kashmir Issue*

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's India policy and the congenital anti-Indianism may be attributed to the her domestic factors, especially the Bonapartist nature of her state system wherein the military-bureaucracy, complex dominates, working in tandem with the support of the Islamic fundamentalist groups, in building and sustaining what may be termed as the 'terror industry' in order to destabilize Kashmir and wrest it from India. They, in their very own interest in order to ensure the legitimacy of their survival and operations, often attempt to successfully thwart any sort of peace initiatives, prospects of stability, dialogue in India-Pakistan relations that is initiated at the Track-I levels of diplomatic exchange. According to Harsh V Pant, "India and Pakistan are moving through a road to nowhere-whenever India and Pakistan decide that they need to talk, either the talks happen and nothing comes out of it, or even before the talks start, something happens to derail them. It can be considered the biggest failure of Indian diplomacy that even after more than six decades, India has not found a way to neutralize the challenge posed by a neighbor one-eighth its size"(Pant, 2016: p12)

The question remains whether the inception of Narendra Modi as the Indian Prime Minister in 2014 has brought

any effective positive changes in India's Pakistan policy. In the context of an Indo-centric South Asian region, India may be conceptualized as a pre-eminent yet 'reluctant' power, strong in the capability quotient but lacking the attitude and aspiration and the endeavor to stamp assertively its dominance in the region. India's immediate neighborhood policy seems to reflect such a lack of an attitude identifiable with an emerging power in the contemporary world order. In the interplay between Realism and Idealism in the realm of Indian foreign policy, pragmatism and hard-core realism has often been arrested by an adherence to the inherent idealistic culture of peace, non-violence, open diplomacy and adherence to moral norms, and reluctance to project hard power in astute military sense of the term. The paper analyzes the contemporary directions of Indo-Pakistan strategic ties in such a context, especially harping on the so-called 'proactive' initiatives of PM, Modi and whether that can signal a turnaround in the context of India's relations with Pakistan in particular and in the broader context of India's Pakistan policy as well as with South Asian neighbors as well, in a pervasive spirit of pragmatic Realism. Modi's 'neighborhood first' policy of actively engaging the South Asian neighbors as the first step towards working to engage an extended neighborhood also included initial positive overtures towards Pakistan. But as the 'march towards a composite and comprehensive dialogue' were slowly progressing, they were cut short due to the Pathankot attacks, followed by attacks on army bases in Uri and Nagrota. Modi initiated a somewhat tit-for-tat tactics in unleashing the counter-offensive Surgical Strikes, threatened to revoke the 1960 Indus Water Treaty, the MFN status given to Pakistan and took the issue of Pakistan as a state that sponsors terrorism, to global quarters in order to brand Pakistan's image, negatively, as a terror-sponsoring state. Hence India and Pakistan, despite Modia's proactivist foreign policy initiatives, still stand on a road to nowhere, if one considers the prospects of a government-level, politically mediated and diplomatic solution to the problem—the road is, as it has been in the past, virtually blocked

The paper, in such a backdrop enquires into the role of media images in the context of India-Pakistan relations, especially harping on the prospective alternative role of media and citizen diplomacy and Track IV diplomatic initiatives and their viability in the betterment of the same. The research question is whether media images can act as a platform for citizen diplomacy, how it can play an integrative role and initiate peace initiatives, step-by-step, with the NGOs, Women's Groups etc working in tandem, in order to smoothen political rigidities, reduce trust deficit, breed spirit of cooperation, connect with the people across the borders

Media Images in IR and Citizen Diplomacy

Media Images in IR

Media portrayals of several issues in the form of reports, commentaries, analysis etc represent a sort of mediated reality rather than an objective reality. These images impact on common people as well as the elites, the decision-makers. Hence, media images can influence the foreign policy- making process and thereby interests both students of media studies and IR per sec.

Citizen Diplomacy

Joseph Montviile (1981) defined Citizen Diplomacy as "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion and organize human and material resources in ways that might help to resolve their conflict." (Tere, 2014: p12)

- The power in citizen diplomacy lies with people, who are in no way associated with the government or any power position. These are the people who are viewed as the least important stakeholders in bringing about a change in antagonistic relations.

- The capacity of citizen diplomacy lies in building trust and confidence among rival populations who have long been fed with hatred and distrust of the 'other'.

- A process of questioning stereotypes and enemy images can be initiated by citizen interactions between populations who have kept away from each other for reasons that are at best political.

- The possibility of direct contact, personal experience and humanizing the 'other' is offered only by citizen diplomacy whereas official diplomatic energies are aimed at asserting political and military superiority over the 'other'.

- As a practice, citizen diplomacy works mutually with official diplomacy and lends a kind of complementarity to ongoing governmental interaction. It can be easily incorporated into the framework of official diplomatic processes.

- Since it is unofficial in nature, citizen diplomacy is devoid of the pressure and expectations that surround an official diplomatic meeting.

- The informal nature of interactions involved in citizen diplomacy offers a wide range of perspective and ideas to be incorporated into discussions without the rigid and structured approach that characterizes official diplomacy.

- It is possible that sustained citizen diplomatic efforts result in popular demand and make governments realize the urgency of working on peace based programs and solutions. (Tere, 2014: p13)

Media and Citizen Diplomacy

- As a venue for citizen diplomacy, the media can be used as a forum to air alternative points of view which may not be possible in media exchanges conducted by regimes. The limitations and constraints of such interactions can be overcome through the interactive model. Citizen diplomats working through the media can also play the role of citizen journalists in their respective countries disseminating truthful and accurate information about the 'other' side ((Tere, 2014: p11)

- For improved relations between rivals, it is essential that the engagement with the 'other' is not state-driven but 'people-driven'. This gives a better chance of improvement in relations as media's 'soft power' (Joseph Nye)can be aptly utilized by citizen diplomats. (Tere, 2014: p11)

South Asian military and security complex revolves around the bitter and the entangled conflict between estranged neighbors – India and Pakistan. (Tere, 2014: p13) Brighter prospects for a South Asian century are difficult to realize unless the two countries reconcile their differences and agree to prosper in peace. Among all the levels of diplomatic relations between the two, Citizen Diplomacy (CD) is the most significant but the least practiced. This is because the India-Pakistan conflict is more a battle of perceptions in which governments try to outdo the 'other'. (Tere, 2014: p13) It is in this context that the paper scrutinizes the role of mainstream media in building confidence and promoting better relations.

Research has proved that the role of media in interstate conflict is nationalistic, jingoistic and populist. Media become the purveyor of hatred when they actually possess the potential to facilitate peace and cooperation. Both the mainstream media and processes of Citizen Diplomacy can synergize to alter state-centric perceptions of conflict. (Tere, 2014: p13) *Media can serve as an excellent avenue for Citizen Diplomacy*. (Tere, 2014: p12)Through the communications media, citizens of both countries can meet, exchange views, hear the unheard and witness the unseen. It is imperative for Citizen Diplomacy to effectively utilize the platform provided by media to positively transmit ideas and cultures across the border, to shatter prejudices and to debunk myths that contribute to the perpetuation of conflict. (Tere, 2014: p13)

Key 'media peace initiatives' in different mediums like the press and online media can be examined. These initiatives present a collaborative effort between the media of the two states. One may examine a 'media institution' which represents the institutionalization of media exchanges between the two states (Tere, 2014: p12). To study these novel initiatives, theoretical inspiration is sought from Johan Galtung's 'Peace Journalism' Model. (Galtung, 2010: p.23) One can challenge the notion that the media can only be warmongers. Media can work as facilitators of Citizen Diplomacy and arrange for a wider network of citizen exchanges and interaction to take the cause of sub-continental peace ahead. (Tere, 2014: p13)

While '*Aman Ki Asha'* is a joint peace initiative of the two largest selling newspapers of India and Pakistan; *Romancing the Border* (RTB) is an online initiative on Facebook that attempts to establish connections among young Indians and Pakistanis. SAFMA – South Asian Free Media Association is an institution that works for media exchange and interaction in South Asia. (Tere, 2014: p15)

There is no doubt that people to people contacts will enhance regional cooperation in South Asia. With the explosion of the media in this region, it is suitable to utilize its potential for citizen diplomacy. However, the media's role has to go beyond virtual exchanges; to be harnessed to let people actually meet the 'other'. Media's role in citizen diplomacy may help to negate the adverse impact that official diplomacy has on relations of the two nations. In the case of India and Pakistan, even the role of the media has been observed to remain hostage to interstate relations. Citizen Diplomacy via the media can work only when it resolves its tiff with those who support the national security paradigm in interstate affairs. There are many factors which will determine the success of media efforts at promoting citizen diplomacy in the sub-continent: support from government and bureaucracy, support from the mainstream media on both sides, how successfully is the media able to filter solutions provides by citizen diplomats to government operated channels, financial and infrastructural assistance, an incorporation of the human security issues apart from political and military discussions, improved media access in both India and Pakistan and a proper institutionalization of the channels through which the media can participate in citizen diplomacy. (Faiz, 2009: p30)

A number of criticisms are leveled at the media's role in citizen diplomacy. There is no dearth of forums encouraging people to people contact between Indians and Pakistanis, even though such existing mechanisms have not been able to function effectively. The concern is the rationale behind introducing the media in this process when there is a lack of political will to make such forums work. Also, in an era where the media are excessively controlled by the state and corporate giants, how successfully can it play a role in citizen diplomacy? Those arguing from the standpoint of national security contending that people to people contact will not help in resolving problems which are essentially the domain of the government. During a security situation, will the media continue to be a platform for citizen diplomacy or

will it portray a state-centric view? Again the question remains, whether these avenues can be utilized in the context of India's relations with her other neighbors.

Films, New Social Media-Mediated Reality

Even films, television programmes, new social media can be utilized as avenues in this context. Films like Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Veer Zara, Filmistan showcased Indo-Pakistan solidarity as mediated reality. The culture of peace can we be woven as a mediated reality first and then translated into effective governmental-level efforts. Popular opinion needs to be generated which can act as stimulants in the realms of decision-making at the top levels of govt.

Mediated reality needs to be translated into effective real steps towards designing policies at the Track-I levels from which peace can be engendered in the region. The road to peace in South Asia apparently seems deadlocked with political factors being the arresting notion, yet the endeavors towards taking small and honest steps towards peace-building and overall stability of the region should be continued with.

CONCLUSIONS

The future of South Asia has to be written by the South Asian societies rather than by the states which are mired in conflict. Reflecting on the above the paper argues that there may be a clarion callfor the civil-society-sector linkages, citizen diplomacy, people-to-people contact that can somewhat smoothen the rigidities prevailing at the political, elite-levels, to come forward in furthering the future of a region so immense in its potentialities-connectivity. The media, both traditional and new media can act as cementing forces, its conflict-transformation and peace-building potential can be positively harnessed with a positive mindset. Academicians and specialists working in this area can also come up with some positive discourses –can act as harbingers of new ideas that can foster a spirit of cooperation and strive to build bridges of connectivity-a requiem for peace and conflict resolution among the two frontline states of South Asia.

- In terms of spatiality, in the South Asian Region, three types of spaces can be envisaged-Statist/elitist/ political space/rigid borders symbolizing divisions among countries/political rigidities at elitist levels(space-1)

- Mediated space(space-2)

- In between these two layers a convergent spaces(space-3) can be possibly constructed/envisaged-a space for civil-society sector linkages

- That can strive to act as drivers of integration, peace-building, conflict-transformation, connectivity and attempt to build bridges for facilitating elite /statist level connectivity and thereby stimulate possible alternative path to peace.

Complimentarily needs to be maintained between Track-I/II and Track IV/V initiatives in order to promote viable and effective engines that can drive the peace process and make it durable. The bridges of trust, cooperation, common mindset, understanding of oneness, that can be built up in this process or at least attempted can go a long way in reducing trust deficit, conflict transformation, reduction of animosity levels, create an atmosphere for conflict reduction, resolution and confidence building and lead to building of an effective security community by a process of dilution of the complex and competitive security matrix of the region-these bridges if effectively utilized by policy makers can lead to inbreeding of an effective culture of peace in the region which is a dire necessity.

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